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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship between question intonation patterns in French using dislocated questions and question-focus (Q- focus). A dislocated question is defined as an interrogative sentence whose sequence is interrupted by the topicalization of a constituent at the left ("Toi, tu viens?"), at the right (Tu viens, toi?"), or in the middle as a parenthetical insertion ("Ta mere, je pense, va bientot revenir?"). A phonetic experiment indicated that when Q-focus shifts to the left, Q-intonation shifts to the left as well; moreover, when a subject or object of an interrogative is topicalized (e.g. "tu" becomes "toi") and not found in sentence final position, it has a falling intonation. A perception experiment identified the modality of truncated sentences and determined that the intonation patterns of these sentence parts do not carry Q-focus, nor do they express a question. The tests show that the part of the question that bears Q-focus always has rising intonation, despite its position in the sentence. Parenthetical insertions never carry interrogative intonation. (TR)

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Correlation between Question Intonation and Focus of Interrogation

-- Evidence from French Dislocated Questions

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Abstract

Instrumental evidence, in general agreement with the results of a perception test, demonstrates that in French dislocated questions the intonation patterns depend on the location of the focus of interrogation: wherever the focus of interrogation is positioned, that section of the utterance is realized with question intonation (i.e. a rising terminal). In other words, when the focus of interrogation is fronted, the rising intonation is shifted to the left as well.

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1. Introductioln

A dislocated question is an interrogative sentence whose sequence is interrupted either by (anti)topicalization of a constituent or by insertion of a parenthesis. In French, the dislocation may occur to the left, to the right or in the middle. In left-dislocation, the topicalized element is pre-posed to the matrix sentence, e.g. *Le voyage*, ça s'est bien passé? "The trip, it was good?"; in right-dislocation, the topicalized element, what Lambrecht in his study of the topic (1981) calls the "antitopic", is post-posed,[1] e.g. Il est chic, *ton mec*? "He is terrific, your man?"; while "middle-dislocation" involves a parenthetical insertion, e.g. Ta mère, *je pense*, va bientôt revenir? "Your mother, I think, is going to return very soon?". In her study about the intonation of French dislocated questions Annan (1983) paid no attention to the relationship between Q-intonation and Q-focus. My investigation of French dislocated-Qs has concentrated on this relationship and therefore on the intonation patterns of the first part of the sentence before the break, because I have assumed that it is just in this part that this relationship is manifested. A phonetic experiment and a perception test were carried out for the purpose.

2. Phonetic Experiment

A corpus was prepared and recorded by 4 native French speakers (2 males and 2 females) with a high quality tape recorder in the sound-treated room of the Institute of Linguistics and Phonetics, University Paris III. The data were analyzed through a mingograph.[2]

2.1. Topicalized Subject

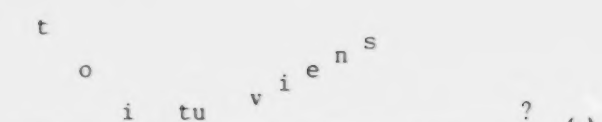
The subject of the sentence is topicalized via dislocation either to the left:

(1) Toi, tu viens? "You, you will come?"

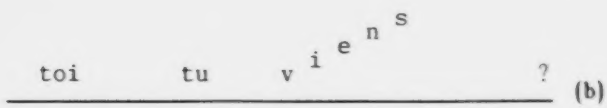
or to the right:

(2) Tu viens, toi? "You will come, you?"

Although these two sentences are semantically similar, the intonations of the first parts are different in my data: *toi* in (1) is uttered either with a falling (most commonly) or with a sustained intonation:

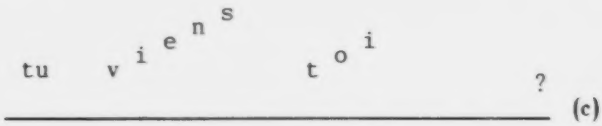


(a)



(b)

In (2), *tu viens* is uttered consistently with a rising intonation, though the utterance terminates with a rising intonation:



(c)

The diversity of the intonation patterns of the first part leads me to assume the existence of an intrinsic relationship between Q-intonation and Q-focus: when Q-focus is fronted, Q-intonation is shifted to the left as well. In both left- and right-dislocations above, the focus of interrogation is on the act of "coming". The speaker seeks to know whether the addressee is *coming* or *not coming*. The Q thus focuses on *tu viens*, which must have the rising intonation -- the only Q-marker used here to signal questionness. When *tu viens* is fronted as in (2), the rising intonation is shifted to the left as well. In (1), since *toi* does not bear Q-focus, it is assigned a falling intonation. *Toi* in (2) has a rising intonation because it terminates the interrogative; the rising ending is the sole marker of questionness in the entire utterance.

2.2. Topicalized NP -- Subject[3]

The sentence is:

Ta voiture, elle marche bien? "Your car, it runs OK?"

Regardless of the different pitch inflexion of the two first syllables, [ta] and [vwa] in my data, the last syllable [tyr] of the first part *ta voiture* is realized consistently with a falling intonation; the second syllable [vwa] is either higher or lower than the first [ta].

ta

voi- ture elle marche b i e n ? (d)

voi-
ta ture elle marche b i e n ? (e)

This pattern is similar to (1) in the previous section except that the topic here is a full NP rather than a 2nd-person pronoun (*toi*).

2.3. Topicalised NP -- Object

In French, which is an SVO language,[4] noun-objects are generally placed after the verb. When topicalized, noun-objects may be fronted with a clitic copy remaining before the verb.

La fenêtre, tu l'as fermée? "The window, you've closed it?"

The first part, *la fenêtre*, is realized, as in the two sentences discussed previously, with a falling intonation.

la

fe- nê- tre tu l'as fer- m é e ? (f)

This is because the Q-focus is on the new information at the end of the sentence. Though *la fenêtre* (the topic) is fronted, the focus of the interrogation is whether or not the window is *closed*.

2.4. "Antitopicalised" NP -- Object

In the question:

Tu as vu cette fille-là, la blonde? "Did you see that girl, the blond?"

the object *la fille* is elaborated by means of an afterthought -- *la blonde*. The first part *tu as vu cette fille-là* is uttered with a rising intonation because it bears the interrogation.

tu as vu cette fil- le- là
la b l o n d e ?

(g)

In short, the first part of dislocated Qs in French is assigned a rising intonation when it bears the Q-focus of the interrogation; otherwise, it has a falling intonation. The questionness of the intonation correlates with the location of Q-focus: wherever Q-focus is positioned, the intonation of that part signals the interrogation.

2.5. Parenthesis

A parenthesis consists of a word, phrase or clause interpolated in the middle of a question. Its function is to insert an additional, parenthetical thought on the part of the speaker. The meaning of the interrogation is complete even without it. Semantically, the parenthesis has a secondary importance in the message of the communication. The semantic reduction results in a diminution of stress, as Chao (1932:127) observes: "Parenthetical expressions often lose their stress."

In the interrogative:

Tu seras là, c'est sûr, ce soir? "You will be there, for sure, this evening?"

c'est sûr constitutes the parenthesis. It is realized with a low sustained intonation. It starts with a low key and remains within this low register with a slight rise only at its end. In my data, the first syllable nucleus [ɛ] is 4 demi-tones[5] lower than the preceding [a] in *là* and lasts only 30 msec. Given the pitch lowering and the shortening of the duration of the first syllable, the parenthesis is unstressed from the very beginning. The overall low pitch of the parenthesis contributes toward lessening its semantic load in the message.

The two parts surrounding the parenthesis are both realized with a rising intonation; however, the second rise is higher than the first because of the oxytonic trend of French prosody.

tu se- ras là
c'est sûr ce soir ? (h)

In sum, that part of a dislocated Q which bears Q-focus will always have a rising intonation; the rest is assigned a falling intonation or an overall low pitch. Questionness signalled by intonation correlates with the location of Q-focus, i.e., interrogation is expressed by the intonation of that part of the question in which Q-focus is located.

3. Perception Test

In order to verify my assumption about the correlation between Q-focus and the questionness of the intonation of the first part of dislocated Qs, a perception experiment was carried out. The six sentences were truncated, with only the first part extracted. The laryngeal output[6] of the six utterances and their truncated sections, a total of 12 items, as spoken by the best French Informant judged by two French phoneticians, were reproduced at random onto a test tape. 48 students at the Institute of Technology of the University of Nanterre at Ville d'Avray served as listeners. They were asked to judge whether the melody they heard was that of a statement, question, exclamation or incomplete statement (continuity). Table 1 lists the results, S stands for statement, Q for question, E for exclamation and IS for incomplete statement. The odd-numbered sentences are unaltered dislocated Qs and the even ones are the truncated first parts; the figures represent the numbers of the the listeners' responses.

It may be seen from Table 1 that unaltered dislocated Qs are without exception perceived as questions. With respect to the truncated parts, the interpretations differ: nos. 4 and 10 are identified as questions; nos. 6 and 8 as continuity; no. 2 as exclamation; and the modality of no. 12 is ambiguous. A categorization of the truncated parts helps to clarify the relationship between the location of Q-focus and the questionness of the intonation. The truncated parts may be classified into two categories according to the nature of the sentence-break. There exist two ways to disrupt interrogatives: insertion and (anti)topicalization. No. 12 is the first part of an interroga-

Table 1 Identification of the modality of dislocated Qs

Sentences	S	Q	E	IS
1. toi, tu viens	0	41	7	0
2. toi	0	5	30	13
3. tu viens, toi	5	32	6	5
4. tu viens	8	33	4	3
5. ta voiture, elle marche bien	2	45	1	1
6. ta voiture	8	0	9	31
7. la fenêtre, tu l'as fermée	2	45	1	0
8. la fenêtre	3	0	19	26
9. tu as vu cette fille-là, la blonde	2	27	16	3
10. tu as vu cette fille-là	4	25	13	6
11. tu seras là, c'est sûr, ce soir	3	34	6	5
12. tu seras là	8	11	12	17

tive split by the insertion of a parenthesis; the remaining even-numbered items, 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10, belong to the category of interrogatives containing a dislocated (anti)topic, either subject or object.

The modality of the truncated part in the dislocation by insertion is vague and the questionness is uncertain: 16.7% of the judgments are for statement, 22.9% for question, 25% for exclamation and 35.4% for continuity. This distribution indicates that although the truncated part bears Q-focus, the questionness of its intonation is weak. It seems that the parenthesis which follows immediately after the truncated part lessens the Q-load of the intonation. The parenthesis represents a grammatically and syntactically complete assertion uttered with a low sustained intonation. The assertive nature of the parenthesis thus obscures to a degree the questionness of the intonation in the preceding truncated part.

In the category of dislocated (anti)topics, all of the truncated first parts which carry Q-focus, namely nos. 4 and 10, are interpreted as questions, whereas in the case of the truncated first parts which do not bear Q-focus, neither 6 nor 8 is identified as a question: only 10.4% (which is not significant) of the responses in no. 2 are for question. It is obvious that the intonation of the truncated parts which **do not carry Q-focus** does not sufficiently express the questionness. The NQ interpretations of the intonation of these parts vary: the pronoun *toi* in no. 2 is perceived as exclamation, and the two nouns, *ta voiture* in no. 6 and *la fenêtre* in no. 8, are

recognized as continuity. It appears that the frequency of usage of these three words influences the interpretation of the modality of the intonations. Although the intonation patterns of the three are similar (a falling intonation), the monosyllabic second person singular tonic pronoun *toi* is more frequently used in exclamations than the two others, which are more easily interpreted as a continuity. The demarcation seems clear in the dislocated (anti)topics: the part bearing Q-focus is perceived as Q and the part not bearing Q-focus is identified as NQ. The perception test corroborates in principle the instrumental analysis, except for the case of parenthesis, where the modality of the intonation of the first part is not clearly identifiable.

4. Conclusion

The instrumental analysis, in accordance with the results of the perception test, demonstrates that when either the subject or the object of an interrogative is topicalized, the topicalized part which is not at the sentence-final position has a falling intonation; whereas the part which bears the Q-focus of the interrogation, wherever it is positioned, either at the sentence-initial or final positions, always has a rising intonation. With respect to parenthetical interrogative, the parenthesis is uttered with a low pitch and without stress, while the rest parts all have a rising intonation. This is because the parenthesis does not carry a semantic load of interrogation. These findings lead me to the following conclusion: the intonation patterns of French dislocated Qs depend on the location of Q-focus, i.e. wherever Q-focus is positioned, that section of the utterance is realized with Q-intonation.

NOTES

[1] The right-dislocated element has also been referred to by Lambrecht as an "afterthought", i.e. what the traditional grammar terms as "apposition".

[2] The mingograph is composed of an intensimeter (model Bruel and Kjoer), an oscilloscope with dual tracks (model Tektronix), a filter (model Alisson) and a detector of melody.

[3] NP stands for noun phrase.

[4] Cf. Joseph H. Greenberg, "Some Universals of Grammar with Particular References to

the Order of Meaningful Elements," *Universals of Language*, ed. Joseph H. Greenberg, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT P, 1963) 73-113.

[5] "Tone" means here "any one of the full intervals of a diatonic scale" (*Webster's Dictionary of the English*, New York: Publ. Inter. P, 1968). "Demi-tone" is a common unit used by French phoneticians; it corresponds to the English term "semitone".

[6] The laryngeal output is obtained by using Forcin's laryngograph. It consists of short-term variations in glottal electrical resistance, having acoustic properties of fundamental frequency, amplitude and time only, all segmental information being deleted. For details see Ivan Fónagy, "A New Method of Investigating the Perception of Prosodic Features," *Language and Speech* 21.1 (1978): 34-49.

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